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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE PARTNERSHIPS FOR DEMOCRACY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

SEPTEMBER 11TH-12TH
RIGA, LATVIA

REPORT



AUTHORS OF THE REPORT

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SUMMARY

From May 15th, 2023, to November 15th, 2023, Latvia is holding the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The Latvian Presidency is focusing on the following priorities: (1) strengthening of the common democratic values and principles; (2) promoting media freedom, freedom of expression and making headway with the digital agenda of the Council of Europe; (3) advancing reforms of the Council of Europe. While promoting these priorities, the gender balance and the importance of the involvement youth and civil society will be taken into account to strengthen democratic processes in Europe.

Building on these priorities and the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy, the international conference “Partnerships for Democracy, Development and Peace” took place on the 11th and 12th of September in Rīga, Latvia. Among the conference participants were 74 people from 13 countries and included politicians, civil servants, academia, NGOs, civic activists and private sector representatives. The conference aimed to put forward substantial questions of the changing nature of the partnerships among governments, multilateral institutions and CSOs, and also within the civil society itself - examining the role of the local level civic activism and its regional and global level impact. Furthermore, the conference expressed the strong commitment of the civil society to take a leadership role of building social resilience for a more peaceful world. Sustainability of democracy and resolution of the causes of conflicts in the region were central topics for more prosperous regional development.

The conference was two days long. The first day was a Warm up session “New and emerging digital technologies: risks and opportunities for democracy”, setting the stage for subsequent discussions. The topic of the warm up session was based on the implications of the positive and negative impacts, risks and opportunities created and accelerated by emerging digital technologies and AI on democracy, human rights and the rule of law, in light of the Reykjavík Declaration. The second day was devoted for deeply engaging with topics concerning democracy, resilience and good governance, and posing fundamental questions regarding the evolving dynamics of partnerships among governments, multilateral institutions, and civil society organizations.

The conference attendees, both speakers and participants played a crucial role not only in regards to the content and the quality of discussions at the conference but also in their daily work at different governance levels and various different civil society organizations. These were people who are shaping the future democratic agenda and reinforcing the significance of civil society as a cornerstone of a functional democracy. By holding these positions and experience from their work, the participants contributed to the discussions through sharing successes and challenges and thus offering their perspectives and constructive proposals for enhancement. Thereby, the speakers, moderators and audience consisting of politicians, civil servants, academics, CSOs, and civic activists together created a platform for learning and exchanging practices.

This Report summarizes the conference program. It includes summaries of key speeches and all panel discussions as well as the main conclusions, take-away messages and questions that remain unanswered. The Final Statement consists of concrete suggestions to the Council of Europe, other international institutions, governments and CSOs to implement the Reykjavik Declaration and strengthen our democracies in the region and beyond. This document is going to be submitted to the Council of Europe institutions, the Parliamentary Assembly, and civil society organizations already engaged in the work of the Council of Europe.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Civic Alliance - Latvia would like to express gratitude to all participants of the forum, 74 persons from 13 countries.

A special thanks to all of the panel discussion moderators and speakers Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica, Edvards Smiltēns, Marja Ruotanen, Michael O'Flaherty, Katju Holkeri and Jānis Citskovskis, Iveta Kažoka, Inese Vaivare, Andris Gobiņš, Linda Jākobsons – Gavala, Ana Aptsiauri, Ivo Rollis, Oleksandr Galkin, Małgorzata Szuleka, Anastasia Crickley, Rihards Bambals, Kateryna Rashevskaya, Elmārs Pļaviņš, Justina Kaluinaite, Siiri Aulik, Kerttu Willamo, Artūrs Kaņepājs, Róbert Bjarnason, Kaspars Kauliņš, Inese Kuške and Kristel Kriisa.

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- Photo from the conference available [here \(11th September\)](#) and [here \(12th September\)](#). Photos by Gints Ivuškāns.
- Video recording of the conference available [here](#).
- Catering: social enterprise "[RB Cafe](#)".



WARM UP SESSION: “NEW AND EMERGING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES: RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEMOCRACY”

Day 1

On September 11th, the conference commenced with a preliminary Warm up session “New and emerging digital technologies: risks and opportunities for democracy”, setting the stage for subsequent discussions. The topic of the warm up session was based on the implications of the positive and negative impacts, risks and opportunities created and accelerated by emerging digital technologies and AI on democracy, human rights and the rule of law, in light of the Reykjavík Declaration. As these technologies can have an impact on underserved population groups and meanwhile can reshape and serve as a tool for citizen engagement, these were central themes during the two parts of the warm up session, first, a panel discussion “Balancing legal frameworks with technological progress: upholding democracy in the digital era of new and emerging technologies and artificial intelligence” and, second, four presentations of “Practical examples of the use of digital and AI technologies in the public, NGO and private sector”.

PART I: PANEL DISCUSSION “BALANCING LEGAL FRAMEWORKS WITH TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS: UPHOLDING DEMOCRACY IN THE DIGITAL ERA OF NEW AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE.”

The panel discussion was hosted by Iveta Kažoka, the director of the Centre for Public Policy “PROVIDUS”. The panelists represented different countries, expertise and organizations from the public and civil society sector. The first speaker was Siiri Aulik, the head of the delegation of Estonia to the Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAI), and member of the Bureau. The second speaker was Kerttu Willamo, policy and capacity Building Officer at the European Civic Forum. The third speaker was Artūrs Kaņepājs, chair of the board at “Effective Altruism Latvia”. The main theme of the panel discussion was regarding legal frameworks accompanying the rise of new digital technologies and advancements in AI, including the potential challenges and risks, and opportunities that these innovations pose to democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Key topics discussed in the panel discussion:

- AI is advancing faster than anticipated by experts.
- Several risks arise with the current and future advancements of AI technology posing as possible threats to democracy and human rights violations. For example, AI technology could be used to spread false information with targeted audiences and recipients, thereby creating polarization and space for populism. Similarly, surveillance could be advanced using AI technology potentially threatening the freedom of assembly. Additionally, racially biased AI systems can deny entry of migrants on the premise of security threats. The discussion on these risks and their solutions needs to be democratized.
- AI technology development needs to be aligned with the legal conceptualization of democracy and the rule of law. To ensure that, new legislations are put in place within, such as the AI Act (the first legally binding act on AI) and the Digital Services Act within the EU and beyond.
- AI technology is changing the every-day life in many industries. Therefore, the civil society needs to familiarize itself and learn about AI technology, including its usage in daily tasks.
- AI systems are not biased by default. These technologies are neutral, yet, they can integrate biases from people creating and operating them. Therefore, the objective is to develop AI technology that is less biased than the average person.
- It is necessary to reflect on who is present and who is absent when discussions on the use, dangers and opportunities of AI usage arise. There is a lack of participation of the civil society as the topic is perceived to affect only companies and organizations working in the technological industry. The civil society should collaborate with the private sector, academia and governance institutions on both national and international levels on this issue. On the other hand, opportunities and current involve.

Please find the recording of the panel discussion [here](#).

PART II PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF THE USE OF DIGITAL AND AI TECHNOLOGIES IN THE PUBLIC, NGO AND PRIVATE SECTOR

The second part of the Warm-up session was devoted to expert presentations of real-life examples of the usage of AI and other digital tools across several sectors. The diverse examples from the public sector illustrated how these technologies can enhance decision-making processes, citizen engagement, transparency and other good governance practices, exemplifying the transformative potential of technology in strengthening democratic frameworks and governance structures. Similarly, the presenters shed a light on the potential of AI and other niche digital tools in the private sector.

The first presentation was delivered by Róbert Bjarnason, the co-founder and president of Citizens Foundation Iceland who presented civic technology tools for improving decision-making and accelerating innovation in the civil society sector.

The second presenter was Kaspars Kauliņš, the International Business Development Director at Tilde. His presentation was about the use of digital tools in the national language technology platform Tilde.

The third presentation was led by Inese Kuške, a consultant for good governance affairs at the Public Administration Development Division of the State Chancellery of Latvia. Inese Kuške presented an E-government system in Latvia - a portal for the development of legal acts. Please find the presentation [here](#).

Finally, the fourth presenter was Kristel Kriisa who is an AI Project Manager at the Machine Learning and Language Technology Department within the Estonian Information System Authority. Kristel Kriisa's presentation was about the public sector solutions using AI and other digital technology. The presentation is available [here](#).

Please find the recording of all presentations [here](#) (starting from 01:50:00).



CONFERENCE “PARTNERSHIPS FOR DEMOCRACY, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE”

Day 2

The Reykjavík Declaration commits to securing and strengthening democracy and good governance at all levels throughout Europe. With the objective of building on the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy, the second day of the conference was devoted to discussions regarding the changing nature of partnerships among different governance levels, including governments, multilateral institutions and civil society organizations. Moreover, a special focus during all of the discussions was put on the civil society organizations which during the recent years have become visible and active actors at local, national and European level. They have proved the ability to respond with high responsibility and solidarity to the need to safeguard democratic values, external threats and new challenges created by the aggressive invasion of Russia in Ukraine. Therefore, the discussions aimed at examining the role of local level civic activism and its regional and global level impact.

The second day consisted of three panel discussions:

- Impact of the regional security challenges and multiple crises the sustainability of democracy;
- From local to global: raising role of local and national level CSOs in multilateral institutions;
- Social resilience: a tool for inclusive, safe and sustainable local communities.

To deeply engage with topics concerning democracy, resilience and good governance, these panel discussions posed fundamental questions regarding the evolving dynamics of partnerships among governments, multilateral institutions, and civil society organizations.



**FIRST OPENING SPEECH BY EDVARDS SMILTĒNS,
THE SPEAKER OF THE PARLIAMENT OF LATVIA - THE SAEIMA**

(Speaker from 01.11.2022. till 20.09.2023.)



On the 12th of September 2023, the second day of the conference, Edvard Smiltēns, the speaker of the Parliament of Latvia “Saeima” greeted the participants and speakers of the conference by emphasizing the priorities of Latvia holding presidency in the Council of Europe and highlighting the importance of the civil society. The Speaker of the Saeima Edvard Smiltēns especially emphasized the role of non-governmental and civil society organizations in providing substantial support to Ukraine and highlighted their broader significance in everyday life for strengthening democracy, security, and resilience in the whole of Europe and beyond. Additionally, the Speaker of the Parliament expressed his gratitude to the non-governmental sector for their vital role in the legislative process and encouraged continued cross-sectoral collaboration. At last, Edvard Smiltēns wished for a successful exchange of challenges and examples of good practice that contribute to common European resilience.

Key points of the opening speech:

- One of the priorities defined by Latvia in the Council of Europe, accurately reflecting national security interests, is strengthening security and resilience in Europe.
- Europe's security story today undoubtedly begins in Ukraine, which is fighting against brutal Russian aggression, which is fighting for its freedom and our shared values. The security of Ukraine is the security of all Europe.
- Civic society organizations have been the main organizing and exciting force behind the massive support given to Ukraine, clearly demonstrating the maturity of the civil society.
- The activity and responsiveness of the civil society not only during extreme crises but also in everyday life means strengthening democracy, security, growth and building resilience. Only with the active involvement of the whole society can a country be able to deal with external security challenges.
- Therefore, there is a need to strengthen civil society by finding new ways of creating a simple and convenient environment for the work of the non-governmental sector.
- The parliament of Latvia is trying to make the possibilities of involvement of society and non-governmental organizations in the legislative process simpler and more convenient.

Please find the full speech in writing [here](#). The recording is available [here](#) at approx. (starting from 0:15).

**SECOND OPENING SPEECH BY KRISTĪNE ZONBERGA,
DIRECTOR OF THE CIVIC ALLIANCE - LATVIA**



The second opening speech was held by Kristīne Zonberga, the director of Civic Alliance-Latvia. In her speech, Kristīne Zonberga highlighted the importance of the civil society in local, national and international governance as well as praised the resilience and strength of the Ukrainian civil society after full-scale invasion from Russia while calling for international support and solidarity to strengthen democracy and security in Ukraine and beyond.

Key points of the second opening speech:

- The concept of civil society is not only an abstract term or an ideal, it is the driving force behind the principles of democracy, social justice and security.
- Civil society must continue to monitor and pressure the government and international organizations to deliver on its promises and obligations to protect democracy. Yet, the civil society must also continue to engage and empower the citizens to participate in the democratic process and contribute to the common good.
- Civil society has shown that it is not only a key pillar of the state, but also a bridge of friendship and cooperation between nations by building partnerships with the aim of strengthening democracy.
- However, the civil society needs support and solidarity from the international community, especially from democratic countries.
- Ukraine is a country that has faced many challenges and threats to its independence, security, and democracy. Yet, despite these difficulties, Ukraine has also shown remarkable resilience and determination to defend its values. And much of this credit goes to the Ukrainian civil society, which has played a crucial role in supporting the democratic transition and social resilience.
- An inspiring example of solidarity and friendship between nations is the remarkable contribution of civil society organizations to Ukraine. NGOs and citizens, mostly from Eastern Europe countries, since 2014 have mobilized to provide humanitarian, financial, and moral support to Ukraine and its people. They have delivered aid and supplies to the Ukrainian army and volunteers, they have welcomed and hosted thousands of Ukrainian refugees, they have organized awareness campaigns and fundraising events, they have fostered cultural and educational exchanges, and they have advocated for Ukraine's European integration.
- By supporting civil society in Ukraine, we are not only helping Ukraine's democracy, but also strengthening our own democracy, security and stability in Europe and beyond.

Please find the full speech in writing [here](#). The recording is available [here](#) (starting from 7:20).

**KEYNOTE SPEECH BY MARJA ROUTANEN, DIRECTOR GENERAL,
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN DIGNITY, COUNCIL OF EUROPE**



Marja Routanen, the Director General at the Directorate General of Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe gave a keynote speech during which she addressed the challenges that current democracies are facing. The Director General set the agenda of the conference by introducing the panel discussion topics, namely “Impact of the regional security challenges and multiple crises the sustainability of democracy”, “From local to global: raising role of local and national level CSOs in multilateral institutions” and “Social resilience: a tool for inclusive, safe and sustainable local communities”; and elaborated on the advancements and future plans of the Council of Europe on each of the themes.

- The Reykjavik Declaration needs to be implemented and integrated more deeply within local, national and international contexts.
- Many countries across the region experience threats to democracy, including democratic backsliding, a decreasing effectiveness of rule of law, a shrinking space for civil society, threats to human rights, among others.
- A diminishing trust in governing authorities and institutions is experienced all across the region. Manifestations of the distrust include a declining participation of young people in elections. Additionally, a significant portion of people perceive protest as the only mechanism through which their voices can effectively reach and influence governmental authorities.
- The civil society plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and countering the democratic backsliding.
- Young people need to be involved in decision-making processes regarding any topic as opposed to only when the topic surrounds youth, their participation in elections is crucial.
- Democracy does not stem from the constitution. Rather, it is a matter of culture and education. Both of these domains need greater resources to increase the quality and growth of democracies and counter the current backsliding.
- The Council of Europe has developed a wide range of tools, policy positions and documents, such as the new and ambitious strategy for education “Learners first” among many others. Additionally, the attention is paid to topics like artistic freedom , academic freedom, violence against women and domestic violence.
- Next year the 70th anniversary of European Culture Convention, adopted on 1954 in Paris will be celebrated;
- CSOs can contribute to advancing the EU agenda and make difference in all these important topics, monitor the standards and prepare the shadow reports.

The recording of the speech is available [here](#) (starting from 11:41).

PANEL DISCUSSION I. “IMPACT OF THE REGIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES AND MULTIPLE CRISES THE SUSTAINABILITY OF DEMOCRACY”

Unprecedented levels of civic activism and government efforts, in light of multiple crises and a changing geopolitical situation, bring together stakeholders from all sectors—politicians, civil servants, entrepreneurs, the academia, and CSOs. At the same time, security challenges and the circumstances of decision-making processes in crisis can impact the transparency of decision-making. Discussions about regulations on “foreign agents” threaten the sustainability of the CSO sector, limiting freedom of association and freedom of speech by smear campaigns against journalists and activists. Therefore, the first panel discussion aimed to address good and more challenging examples reshaping the sustainability of democracy in the region. Furthermore, it aimed to focus on the minimum standards of an enabling environment for the rule of law and civic space.

The panel discussion was moderated by Inese Vaivare, the Director of the [Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation](#). The four speakers were Michael O’Flaherty - the Director of the [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights \(FRA\)](#), Katju Holkeri - Head of the Governance Policy Unit, Public Governance Department, [Ministry of Finance in Finland](#), Ana Aptsiauri - the Legal Advocacy Officer and Project Coordinator at [Equality Movement](#) and Ivo Rollis - a Board Member of the Centre for Public Policy “PROVIDUS”.



Key topics discussed in the panel discussion:

- There is an ongoing polycrisis in Europe, including the recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion in Ukraine and the stemming economic and energy crisis as well as food security issues, natural disasters, rising right-wing populism waves, disinformation and many underserved population groups, including migrants and members of the LGBTQI+ community.
- Additionally, the quality of democracy and trust in government institutions has been observed to decline posing threats to democracy and a shrinking space for civil society organizations, even such dangerous approaches as laws on "foreign agents", labeling CSOs as spies, smear campaigns and government investigations against civic activists.
- Extreme situations and circumstances can serve as litmus tests for the resilience of governments and civil society.
- A wide range of government responses to the ongoing polycrisis and the deterioration of the quality of democracy prevails. While the Finnish example includes the government launching official tools for education, transparency, and participation, including dialogues between the governing institutions and the civic society, the Georgian example entails the government voting for legislative changes that allow for democratic backsliding. Thereby, resilience building for stronger democratic institutions and civil society can look very different in regional contexts across Europe.
- Roma communities and people from the LGBTQI+ communities are one of the most marginalized people in Latvia.
- Governments and CSOs should become better at protecting human rights of all people, especially for the most marginalized and underserved population groups facing many structural barriers and injustices. Human rights must be at the centre of democracy.
- Governments should introduce "Civic Education" programs in the school system as a platform of fostering democracy as a value and "a way of life". Education systems are central elements for the sustainability of democracy, yet also intergenerational spaces must be developed.
- More partnerships need to be built within horizontal and vertical governance for organizations to support one another and cooperate, dialogue is the value of the democratic processes;
- All levels of governance and the civil society ought to keep each other accountable for upholding democratic frameworks and the rule of law, including the development of monitoring systems and indicators. This also includes the creation of spaces for less heard voices, such as establishing youth advisory boards.
- The more democratic and human-rights respectful a society is, the more resilient, safer and capable it is going to be during a crisis. Trust is a crucial building block and a unifying promoter.
- The civil society should act as a "watchdog" for holding the government accountable for limiting fundamental rights to serve the public good especially during the multiple crises.

Please find the recording of the panel discussion [here](#) (starting from 27:25).

PANEL DISCUSSION II. “FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL: RAISING ROLE OF LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL CSOS IN MULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS”

Within the changing nature of civic activism, individuals are playing a more important role. New forms of citizen engagement and association are emerging, such as new global movements with a high focus on human rights, direct influence on decision-makers through internet platforms and other types of media. Many of the decisions on the sustainability of democracies are made at the national and international level, leaving lasting effects on the regional legal and political environment.

This raises the question about the ability of multilateral institutions to reshape their ways of working and become more open to local and national level CSOs instead of hierarchical structures of influence through NGO associations and INGOs. The panel discussion aimed to illustrate good examples of representation of the national and local level organizations at the regional and global level in the field of human rights and other; and generate proposals to improve the transformational change of the partnerships in the Council of Europe.

The second panel discussion was moderated by Andris Gobiņš, the President of the European Movement – Latvia. The four panelists included Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica, the Deputy Speaker of the Saeima and Head of the Latvian Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Anastasia Crickley, the founder of Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre in Ireland, Małgorzata Szuleka, a Board Member and Head of Advocacy at the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and Aleksandr Galkin the Director of “Right to Protection”.



Key topics discussed in the panel discussion:

- Democracy cannot prevail without the protection of human rights.
- Nobody is born vulnerable. Certain population groups are made vulnerable.
- Ukraine offers an example where the government and the civil society are collaborating to serve the people most in need - humanitarian, legal, medical and psychological aid, evacuation, etc. Local governments offer civil society organizations leadership positions while working together.
- In Ukraine civil society organizations play a crucial role currently by providing aid and many forms of assistance, by documenting Russia's war crimes and by advocating for holding Russia accountable for the war crimes. Their role is expected to remain crucial also in the processes of restoring the country and building its future.
- Grassroots movements and organizations are more often not seen or forgotten by the governing national and international institutions while larger civil society organizations get a seat at the table and voice their opinion. Often this gap between the engagement and inclusion of grassroots vs larger organizations is widened by a language barrier.
- Local organisations are not also included in the clusters of funding, donor financing. There is high need for localisation efforts and united response.
- Civil society organizations and activists are often working in extreme circumstances facing prosecution, difficulties cooperating with donors, health issues such as burnout or Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Therefore, maintaining the organization can be a challenging task, while operating and making impact in the content of the polycrisis.
- Council of Europe (CoE) countries need to have obligations for complying with the Strasbourg System and CoE system.
- Local people and organizations are experts in local solutions of global issues. Yet, they need support and resources from the national and international level to scale-up in capacity and engagement.
- The role of civil society organizations is not only to respond to already set agendas, but to participate in the process of setting the agenda through collaborative governance mechanics such as civil forums and dialogues. Within these, the civil society needs to be viewed as an equal party.
- Cooperation and alliance building is crucial to have united voices, yet civil society organizations are in need of support and resources to establish these, more collaboration instead of competition. Coalitions for Agenda2030 can serve this purpose.
- Rule of law needs to be strengthened as political regimes attack justice systems and civil society in some parts of Europe, especially those working with migration, climate change and other politicized issues.
- Working with terminology in the public discourse, the usage of simple, understandable vocabulary is very important.
- The international community has not found a solution for the forcible deportation of thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia. This urgent issue needs to be addressed by local, national and international level organizations. Similar commitments have been declared by the ministers of Justice across many countries within the Council of Europe in their declaration "[On the Path to Justice for Ukraine: Advancing Accountability, Reuniting Children with Their Families, and Supporting the Resilience of its Justice System](#)".

Please find the recording of the panel discussion [here](#).

PANEL DISCUSSION III. SOCIAL RESILIENCE: A TOOL FOR INCLUSIVE, SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The concept of resilience has proven instrumental in tackling adversity and security risks, from individual to state levels, especially in times of geopolitical turbulence and uncertainty. Any ongoing or future crisis is likely to evolve within an increasingly contested information space. As a result, states and societies are compelled to formulate comprehensive cross-sectoral responses. To successfully manage the ongoing 'permacrisis' and respond to the needs, concerns, and expectations of their citizens, while preparing for the crisis, governments have no choice but to craft and implement smarter and more inclusive strategies than ever before, based on a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

Meanwhile, recent years have demonstrated that grassroots initiatives can grow into nation-wide movements of solidarity and civic activism. Non-governmental actors are increasingly serving as trusted messengers to reach vulnerable groups and audiences that distrust government politics. Simultaneously, they contribute to building more inclusive and cohesive societies while reducing inequalities. Therefore, the last panel discussion presented and analyzed several outstanding examples of resilience-building initiatives from civil society to governments, to inter-governmental institutions with a specific focus on Ukraine. Furthermore, the panel discussion aimed to address the preparatory steps for responding to crises the world is probably yet to experience.

The third panel discussion was moderated by Linda Jākobsone - Gavala, a Board Member of "[I Want to Help Refugees](#)". The four speakers were Kateryna Rashevskya, a human rights activist and Legal Expert and Lawyer at the [Regional Centre for Human Rights](#), Dr. Rihards Bambals, Head of the Strategic Communication Department at the [State Chancellery of Latvia](#), Justina Kaluinaitė the Policy and advocacy officer of the [National Non-Governmental Development Cooperation Organisation Platform of Lithuania](#) and Elmārs Pļaviņš, the Senior expert on international military civil cooperation at the National Armed Forces of Latvia.



Key topics discussed in the panel discussion:

- The panel discussion coined the topic of resilience as difficult to measure.
- Nevertheless, the panel discussion crystallized some crucial components of resilience, including (1) a detailed strategy or plan of action to respond to various types of crises, (2) the skills and know-how on how to act, (3) social capital and network for effective communication, coordination and mobilization, (4) trust in institutions, media, civil society, among others and (5) resources, both material and non-material; all of these dimensions referring to the individual, local, national and institutional level. Additionally, collaboration and partnerships that are intersectoral and go within and beyond country borders are crucial elements.
- Resilience-building should be based on a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.
- Governments delegating tasks to the non-governmental sector is a sign of maturity of democracy and society.
- A crucial part of resilience building is the ongoing fight against disinformation and misinformation in the contested informational arena on various media channels.
- Resilience is built prior to the occurrence of exceptional circumstances or crises. Therefore, resilience building should not occur only in the light of Russia's full-scale invasion in Ukraine but, also, when preparing for future crises, considering that Russia's proximity remains to be a close existential threat to many people.
- The response of the Ukrainian society to the existential threat from Russia was highlighted as an example of exceptional resilience that many countries strive for. Ukraine was praised not only for the resilience in the form of cooperation between the public, private and non-governmental sectors but simultaneously for resilience in the fight for the respect of human rights and the fight for a rules-based order across Europe and the world. The civil society in Ukraine has mobilized in an exceptional speed and has been performing functions such as reporting war crimes of the Russian army (beyond 100 000 war crimes), providing support to the victims of these crimes, legal support to Ukrainian children who have been illegally deported and forcibly transported to Russia and their families, protection of cultural heritage and Ukrainian national identity.
- Ukraine is still in need of many forms of support, including the documentation of war crimes by the Russian army, researching various topics regarding the war in academia, building alliances with Ukrainian NGOs, municipalities, government and other entities, voicing Ukrainian demands in the international community, holding Russia accountable for every war crime through a demand of trials and reparations.
- Selective human rights protection is no human right protection and therefore pose threats to democracy and a hindering factor to resilience-building.
- When it comes to resilience building and support for crises, no effort is too small.

Please find the recording of the panel discussion [here](#) (starting from 1:45:15).

CLOSING SPEECH BY JĀNIS CITSKOVSKIS, THE DIRECTOR OF THE STATE CHANCELLERY OF LATVIA



Jānis Citskovskis closed the conference by emphasizing the multiple challenges faced by countries in recent years and emphasizes the importance of identifying the needs of all parties involved in addressing crises. When zooming in on Latvia, Jānis Citskovskis highlighted the initiative to address a crisis of disinformation and distrust. Afterwards, the speaker thanked all of the participants and organizers of the conference.

Key topics of the closing speech:

- In recent years, countries have been continuously faced with crises that inevitably affect their citizens and state governance overall. In the search for actions and solutions, it is essential to identify the needs of all parties involved. Additionally, solving the crises entails taking leadership and responsibility by all parties involved.
- Latvia, like other countries, is facing a crisis of distrust. The State Chancellery has started a new initiative - dialogue circles, or conversations with residents in various cities and regions in Latvia on the topic of trust to explore the main barriers and opportunities.
- Within Latvia, disinformation is one of the drivers for peoples' distrust in the state, administration, and politicians. It is easy to create doubt, especially in crisis situations - in our society, accordingly, at the national level, we have been working purposefully with this issue in recent years, and one of our goals is a partnership with organized civil society, the private and academic sectors, in order to jointly promote the sustainability of society and the ability to recognize and resist manipulation in the information space in society.
- Significant changes in the interaction between the country and its citizens are also brought about by the availability of digital technologies and the continuous progress, allowing to facilitate processes, several examples were discussed in yesterday's discussion. The TAP portal created by the State Chancellery was also among these examples.
- Non-governmental organizations, including an active civil society are partners of the state. Accordingly, the task of the state is to provide a supportive and legal environment for civic activity and to create preconditions for the democratic participation of citizens and the protection of the democratic state system overall.

Please find the full speech in writing [here](#). The recording is available [here](#) (starting from 3:03:10).

SECOND CLOSING SPEECH BY INESE VAIVARE, THE DIRECTOR OF THE LATVIAN PLATFORM FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION



Inese Vaivare gave her closing speech summarizing the main topics covered by the conference and introducing the next steps:

- One of the main topics was alliance building - “sticking together” where Coalitions for Agenda 2030 can play an important role. Development and reaching goals is a shared responsibility of all stakeholders.
- Still CSOs have to keep the distance from governance to monitor and advocate, especially in the countries of repressive governments.
- Language is an important prerequisite for the inclusion of all. Grassroots movements and organizations can face language barriers within their everyday life, awareness raising and advocacy work. The usage of an easy language and simple vocabulary in the public discourse by CSOs and governments is crucial to ensure more inclusive, accessible and transparent politics.
- Education, especially, civic education is essential for individuals to navigate in modern democracies. Dialogue is the basis of democracy;
- Governments are enablers for the democratic societies, rule of law and human rights, civic participation and representation also of the vulnerable groups;
- Systemic discrimination must be recognised if we want to implement transformative changes. Human rights are at the very center of democracy, right to justice for the weakest and those made vulnerable.
- Trust and ability to focus on future are democratic values that hold together diverse societies, especially in times of crisis;
- Still we must recognise the cost of solidarity - change requires a lot of courage, resources at the national and local level and people working in the civil society sector face burnouts;
- It is of high importance to voice the needs of Ukraine and create common pressure to ensure justice;
- In this conference we were ready also to put up uncomfortable topics, such as push backs on the Belarus border, attacks on civil society, using geopolitics to punish civil society activists;
- The results and main addressed issues of the conference are going to be sent to the CoE and national governments to continue the discussions, increase involvement of local and national level CSOs in the multilateral institutions.

The recording of the speech is available [here](#) (starting from 3:09:54).

THE SPEECH BY KRISTĪNE ZONBERGA, THE DIRECTOR OF CIVIC ALLIANCE - LATVIA AT THE FIRST COUNCIL OF EUROPE REGULAR EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY IN STRASBOURG

On the 15th of September, the International Democracy day, the Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić hosted an event to exchange views with Civil Society organizations and members. One of the opening speeches was held by Kristīne Zonberga, the Director of Civic Alliance - Latvia, one of the CSOs organizing the conference "Partnerships for Democracy, Development and Peace". Within her speech, Kristīne Zonberga reported the outcomes and topics discussed at the conference to the audience and the Secretary General, emphasizing the challenges and opportunities that countries and the civil society are facing. Furthermore, the speech underscored the importance of collaboration and dialogue between local, national and international multilateral institutions such as the Council of Europe. Last, Kristīne Zonberga once again emphasized the importance of supporting Ukraine and countries with shrinking civic space by reiterating that such support strengthens democracy, security and stability within Europe and beyond.

Key topics in Kristine Zonberga's speech:

- Today's event aims to improve cooperation within the Council of Europe to create a safe and enabling environment for civil society that could also improve the Council's work.
- The ability of national and local organizations to have a voice in multilateral institutions like the Council of Europe is crucial. The Council can extend its traditional cooperation to engage more directly with national and local-level organizations. Only through direct and open dialogues can we ensure the sustainability of democracy. We also welcome the Council's initiative to survey the accessibility of CSOs at PACE, as this is a step in the right direction.
- CSOs, particularly grassroots organizations, play a vital role in raising awareness and implementing democracy. They are often the first responders during emergencies, delivering humanitarian aid to the most remote areas. They work tirelessly for their causes with limited resources, often facing burnout and smear campaigns.
- Engaging local-level CSOs requires investments in their capacity to participate, translation resources, and the development of common narratives. However, if we define democracy as human rights-centered, with a focus on the most vulnerable, these investments are meaningful steps toward a more inclusive, participatory, and resilient democracy.
- CSOs from Ukraine have made a heartfelt plea for support in documenting war crimes and locating and rescuing children kidnapped by Russia. Our duty is to elevate their cause to the international stage, express our solidarity and take action in support of Ukraine and its people.
- Similarly, participants from various European countries emphasize the issues of democracy backsliding and call for unity when countering smear campaigns and aggressive reactions. They cannot tackle these challenges alone. They require support, solidarity, and even pressure from the international community, including CSOs and international organizations, especially from democratic countries that share the same values and interests. And it takes courage, even within the CSO sector, to stand together and support each other.
- By supporting civil society in Ukraine and countries where we observe shrinking civic space, we are strengthening our democracy, security, and stability in Europe and beyond.
- The work on human rights, as the cornerstone of democracy, will continue, and we hope that Latvia's Presidency can contribute as a building block in this ongoing process.
- The strength of democracy lies in our collective ability to listen, adapt, and stand up for the most vulnerable. Together, we can build a future where human rights are at the heart of our democratic values, and where every voice, especially those of the weakest among us, is not only heard but valued and respected.

Please find the full speech in writing [here](#).

FINAL STATEMENT

Considering the backsliding of the democracy in Europe due to:

- decreasing effectiveness of rule of law and shrinking space for civil society;
- threats to human rights, polycrisis and rise of nationalist populism;
- diminishing trust in governing authorities and institutions;
- significant portion of people perceiving the protest as the only mechanism through which their voices can effectively reach and influence governmental authorities;
- the gap between the engagement and inclusion of grassroots vs larger organizations, including the language barrier

and recognising the civil society as:

- the driving force behind the principles of democracy, social justice and security;
- the protectors of human rights of all people, especially for the most marginalized and underserved population groups facing many structural barriers and injustices;
- proven leaders for the massive support to Ukraine, clearly demonstrating the maturity of the civil society;
- frontliners for work in extreme circumstances facing prosecution, health issues such as burnout or Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD);
- effective and innovative problem solvers for global challenges, especially at the local level;
- trust builders in institutions, media and democracy;

the conference urged the civil society to:

- monitor governments and international organizations to deliver their promises and obligations to protect democracy;
- engage and empower the citizens to participate in the democratic process and contribute to the common good;
- build social capital and networks for effective communication, coordination and mobilization;
- fight actively against disinformation and misinformation, build the social resilience for a more safe Europe;

and urged the governments to:

- serve as enablers for democracy scaling up resources and spaces for civil society capacity and engagement;
- launch the tools transparency, and participation, including open and sustainable dialogues between the governing institutions and the civic society;
- implement civic education initiatives as a platform of fostering democracy as a value and “a way of life”, skills and know how for democratic participation;
- promote multi stakeholder cooperation and alliance building to have united voices, providing resources to the civil society organizations to engage;
- recognise that the resilience-building should be based on a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach;
- delegate tasks to the non-governmental sector as a sign of trust and maturity of democracy and society;

the international organisations to:

- build more partnerships within horizontal and vertical governance for organizations to support one another and cooperate;
- include local organisations in donor financing and localisation of funding;
- support local and national level organisations to sustain in circumstances of polycrisis and under the oppressive governments;
- ensure that civil society organizations do not only respond to already set agendas, but also participate in the process of agenda-setting through collaborative governance mechanics such as civil forums and dialogue.

The Reykjavik Declaration needs to be implemented and integrated in local, national and international contexts.